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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 AMMAN 000264

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FOR NEA, PRM, AND AMBASSADOR FOLEY
FOR DHS LORI SCIALABBA
FOR H/PASS TO CAMMACK AND WAXMAN

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [EAID](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: STAFFDEL CAMMACK VIEWS IRAQIS IN JORDAN THROUGH
UNHCR'S EYES

REF: A. AMMAN 4790

[1](#)B. AMMAN 4738

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During their January 6-7 visit to Amman, Staffdel Cammack (Senate Committee staff members Perry Cammack and Sharon Waxman) visited with senior GOJ officials and were shepherded through Amman by UNHCR, which gave them open access to its registration office, community centers, medical clinics, and the homes of Iraqis. They heard from the Ambassador, UNHCR, NGOs and Iraqi themselves that legalization of status for Iraqi refugees remains a key outstanding issue. The Minister of Planning highlighted the GOJ's USD 1.5 billion supplemental request for assistance before Congress, and the Staffdel urged the GOJ to quickly get more active in raising awareness on the Hill. Jordanian General Intelligence Department (GID) officials lauded their partnership with the UN and described outstanding security concerns. UNHCR's regional resettlement chief implored the U.S. to resettle more Iraqis in 2008 and highlighted their key areas of concern: USG commitment of resources to processing, political commitment to refugees, and flexibility in addressing vulnerable cases and processing waivers. IOM's leadership told Cammack and Waxman that they expected to meet Jordan's portion of the announced 12,000 resettlement target. UNHCR Jordan suggested that better coordination would allow the donor community to leverage health resources and to address still-unmet chronic health care needs. End Summary.

Legalizing the Status of Iraqis in Jordan

[1](#)2. (C) On January 6, GID officials described to the Staffdel the legal framework of the 1998 UNHCR-GOJ Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), but acknowledged that they "bend the rules" and turn a "blind eye" (e.g. when registered Iraqis do not depart within six months, as stipulated in the MOU). During the Staffdel's subsequent meeting with Minister of Planning Suhair al Ali, the Ambassador emphasized that legal status remains an impediment to Iraqis accessing services. For Iraqis to benefit from the substantial donor assistance, the Ambassador said that they must be able to step forward within the Jordanian legal framework. Separately, UNHCR Jordan Representative Imran Riza described the current policy as "tolerated illegality".

[1](#)3. (SBU) During the Staffdel's home visits and briefings with UNHCR, staff and case workers described an Iraqi population that is despondent and frustrated with its situation in Jordan. According to NGOs and UNHCR, some Iraqis have left

Amman for rural areas where they find it easier to live and work (illegally). A single Iraqi female they met during a home visit admitted she works illegally as a wedding photographer but often passes up jobs in the evening for fear of what her neighbors might think and report to the authorities.

¶4. (SBU) Save the Children's Country Director bluntly told the delegation that "legal status is the issue now." Several NGOs reported that "perception is reality" when it comes to deportation - while they can count few documented cases, families still fear deportation which affects their mentality and ability to access services. Other NGOs reported that Jordanian students who bully or harass Iraqi schoolchildren use the threat of deportation to discourage Iraqis from reporting such harassment. A focus group of Iraqis drove their point home when they expressed directly to the delegation their fear of deportation.

¶5. (SBU) Country Directors of Save the Children and CARE suggested to Staffdel that the USG could leverage its recently announced increase of baseline ESF assistance to push the envelope on legal status. Without the right to work, they argued donors will continue to pay to support Iraqis. Meanwhile, they claimed that the dwindling assets of Iraqis in Jordan will lead to increasing desperation. They suggested the possibility of floating a guest worker program akin to those benefiting Egyptians and South Asian workers.

¶6. (C) UNHCR's Riza said that he sees an upcoming window of opportunity to discuss status issues with the GOJ and leverage their increased assistance. Riza believed the GOJ might be amenable to granting amnesty to those in illegal status and waiving overstay fines, though he discounted the possibility of employment for Iraqis in Jordan. UNHCR may

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push for permission to use Iraqi volunteers (who would receive a stipend) in its outreach and assistance programs, and hopes the GOJ will continue to be pragmatic and practical. In the long term, UNHCR wants to adapt its MOU and support national asylum legislation, and is scouring European countries for comparable examples of limited asylum frameworks that could serve as models for Jordan.

Expanding Assistance to Jordan

¶7. (C) In a January 6 briefing, Minister of Planning Suhair Al Ali described for the Staffdel the significant budgetary challenges facing the GOJ in 2008 - including the highly unpopular elimination of fuel subsidies. Ali described the social safety net the GOJ hopes will protect Jordanians through salary increases and greater contributions to health and education systems, but that even without subsidies they face a 9.1% budget deficit before grants. Ali described their "alarming" reliance on energy imports (96%) which the GOJ will continue to finance through the capital account while working towards diversification, energy conservation, and alternate sources of energy (shale oil, wind, nuclear). While poverty levels are improving, Ali cited the continuing challenge of the yet-unpublished figure of 13.5% of Jordanians who live on less than two dollars per day.

¶8. (SBU) Ali described the GOJ's "medium-term" assistance requests for its "temporary guests," citing FAFO numbers (ref B) that she believes suggest Iraqis will stay indefinitely in Jordan. Ali raised the December GOJ supplemental request (ref A) for USD 500 million per year for the next two years to accommodate the increased burden of Iraqis on Jordan's budget. Staffdel Cammack was unaware of this request, and urged Ali and the GOJ to expediently reach out to members of the House and Senate.

Registration, Resettlement and Returns

¶9. (SBU) UNHCR staff described for the Staffdel recent efforts to devote additional resources to renewals - now three days per week with two days of registration. UNHCR also announced its new telephone information hotline that provides information on resettlement and available services. They also told the Staffdel about a pilot database of non-registered Iraqis who use UNHCR-funded services to improve their data about Iraqis in Jordan, identify cases for resettlement, and inform future programming. Despite these efforts, and highlighting the continued strength of the rumor mill in shaping perceptions, several Iraqis insisted to the Staffdel that UNHCR maintains a stack of old cases locked in a room to which no one has a key.

¶10. (C) UNHCR's Beirut-based senior regional officer responsible for admissions, Arafat Jamal, offered a frank assessment and wish-list for USG actions in the coming year. He described the U.S. response as disappointing, and "not commensurate with the scale" of the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. Jamal chastised the U.S. for having only temporary refugee coordinators at Embassy Amman and for what he termed its "business as usual" approach to this refugee situation. He identified an 11,000 person discrepancy between UNHCR's regional referrals and those that have thus far been admitted to the U.S.. Jamal also pushed for increased flexibility of the "credible fear" standard during interviews, suggested that this could be overcome by unspecified "other means" and noted that the standards employed by DHS adjudicators in other refugee situations were not as "grueling." Specifically, Jamal requested the following in 2008:

- a more muscular USG response in terms of financial and personnel resources to recognize the Iraqi refugee crisis as a top priority; Jamal said that 12,000 admissions would be better than last year - but still "not much."
- a greater meshing of political and humanitarian goals to free up departures, suggesting that embassies in Amman and Beirut could do more with the host governments to speed departures. Note: In Jordan, the UNHCR-MOI process for waiving overstay fines and receiving permission to depart takes only one week. End Note.
- more consideration of UNHCR-designated vulnerabilities that may not fit squarely into the credible fear criteria (e.g., women at risk).
- efforts by the USG to address the protection issues of smaller refugee populations in Iraq (e.g. Sudanese, Palestinians, Iranian Kurds).

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¶11. (SBU) Jamal did not expect that repatriation to Iraq would be a significant policy option in 2008 "no matter what happens on the ground." Riza interjected, noting that "one can only leverage departures once they're up and running". UNHCR Jordan's resettlement team admitted that they sometimes do not refer vulnerable cases to the USG because they expect other countries might view them more broadly. Once a case has been rejected by the U.S., they said, it reduces the likelihood of resettlement by another country. They also expressed concern that extended families will not depart Jordan if any individual member of the extended family is not approved for the USRAP, citing the case of a 78-year old grandmother who was denied resettlement, causing the other dozen members to remain with her in Amman. UNHCR Jordan's senior protection officer praised DHS interviewers as "generous with their time" and for generally granting material support waivers, but identified the outstanding issue of solicitation of material support as a continuing (and unfair in their opinion) challenge.

¶12. (SBU) Staffdel Cammack toured IOM's refugee processing facility on January 6 and met with Philip Eanes, the Deputy Director and Kamel Irani, the Acting Country Director. Eanes reported recent USRAP approval numbers: 72 per cent approvals, 16 per cent denials and 12 per cent on hold

(mostly pending waiver on additional documentation requests).

Eanes also discussed efforts to move approximately 20 Baghdad LES from Syria to Amman where they will be interviewed during the next DHS circuit ride, which begins on January 16. When asked if IOM could meet the USG's announced goal of 12,000 resettled Iraqis, Eanes replied that the resources were in place and if we didn't reach the goal in Amman, "we'd go down trying." He estimated that 5,000 to 6,000 Iraqis could be processed out of Jordan in 2008, but that processing would need to occur throughout the region for the overall goal to be achieved. Staffdel Cammack questioned whether DHS should maintain a permanent presence in Amman, to which Eanes responded that the circuit ride system allows IOM time to gear up and prepare large batches of cases, though he noted the utility of a permanent DHS staff presence to fingerprint interviewees.

¶13. (SBU) UNHCR Jordan's resettlement officers highlighted the broader pool of needs in Syria, both in terms of quantity and vulnerability - and suggested that the answer this year simply cannot be "we can't get a visa." If visa troubles persist, they suggested the U.S. develop creative solutions such as transiting referrals through a third country (e.g., Romania) or using video conference. In 2007, UNHCR staff said that they took part in "the numbers game" and admitted that they may have sacrificed some of the protection needs for the greater good of boosting numbers. In 2008, they claimed they intend to devote greater resources to screening cases for greater protection needs.

¶14. (SBU) Staffdel Cammack inquired about the prospect of Iraqis returning to Iraq from Jordan. UNHCR noted that they observed very few. STC's Country Director suggested that "not yet" best described Iraqi attitudes towards return, while International Relief and Development (IRD) - currently in the midst of a survey of Iraqis - claimed that most Iraqis say they left because of personal safety and security concerns. According to IRD's ongoing survey, Iraqis say that improvements in security must be sustained in Iraq before they will consider return as a serious option. UNHCR Iraq's Marco Roggio reiterated the UN commitment not to encourage return until they are assured conditions warrant the return. They are, however, committed to assisting voluntary returns.

Security Threats Persist; Improved UNHCR-GOJ relations

¶15. (C) In their meeting with the Staffdel, Jordanian General Intelligence Department (GID) officials illustrated the continued security challenges that they believe Iraqis in Jordan pose. They recalled the November 2005 hotel bombings, several foiled plots against the Karameh border post, and their evaluation that a number of Iraqis present in Jordan are Iranian intelligence assets. GID officers noted that they frequently uncover fake identity documents, some of which are actually issued by the GOI. They noted their appreciation for USG border assistance and training. Working level GID officials told Staffdel Cammack that the GOJ cooperates closely with UNHCR, which they now believe

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understands the challenges the GOJ faces. GID officers also noted how important they believe it is that the international community "share its burden" with regard to Iraqi refugees.

¶16. (C) For its part, Riza reported that "the level of (GOJ) frustration stabilized this year because UNHCR provided more assistance." He described UNHCR's two-person detention team by which it liaises with the MOI and GID. Generally, HCR said that they get good access to detained Iraqis, especially when they have asylum-seeker certificates. Most Iraqis who are detained are released. When asked why they're detained in the first place, they responded that some are accused of a crime (often forgery of documents) or are attempting to convert others to Shi'a Islam. In cases of criminal charges, nearly none are actually prosecuted - those cases would be

more likely to be deported.

Speaking to Iraqis themselves

¶17. (SBU) Anger, frustration, and fear dominated the conversations the Staffdel had with focus groups of Iraqis on January 7. "Give us status or send us elsewhere," one lamented. Others noted that from 1981 to 1990, Iraq allowed more than 7 million Egyptians as well as millions of other Pakistanis, Indians, Palestinians and Sudanese to work in Iraq. Given this long history, they suggested that other governments in the region (namely Egypt) have not treated them fairly. They generally said they understand that Jordan is not a rich country, but believe that they, as Iraqi citizens, have rights to the oil revenue being generated in their country, and wanted to see their embassy provide stipends. Others complained that they had assets, especially property in Iraq, which they are unable to sell. Rather, they rely on remittances from family and stipends from NGOs. Several Iraqis complained that international organizations are trying to solve the little problems but ignoring the main issues - e.g., status and their inability to work. Many said they felt that nobody listens to them. And during one home visit, a Shi'a widow claimed her 12-year old daughter was harassed by her teacher for her religious beliefs and sent home; she has since refused to return.

Heavy demand for primary health care,
expensive and unmet secondary needs

¶18. (SBU) On January 7, Staffdel Cammack visited a Caritas operated clinic in East Amman that opened in April 2007. Clinic staff identified secondary and tertiary chronic diseases as the greatest outstanding needs. The clinic, composed of three general practitioners and a dentist, operates on a USD 2.3 million budget and has served 33,000 patients. Caritas operated three other clinics: in Zarqa, Jebel Al-Weibdeh, and Jebel Amman. The largest (in East Amman) can see up to 250 persons per day and the others can serve 50-100 people per day. Out of approximately 4,000 cases per month, doctors estimate between 50 to 100 are cancer patients and in need of expensive care they generally cannot afford to provide. They also noted a high prevalence of psychiatric disorders compounded by fear, feelings of intolerance, frustration and instability, and an increase in domestic violence.

¶19. (SBU) Caritas staff believed that Iraqis prefer their clinics to MOH-operated public health facilities because they receive better, more personalized attention and the clinics are less crowded and offer shorter wait times. Iraqis agreed, saying they prefer private healthcare to public, where they fear they won't get the attention they deserve. Other Iraqis met during the course of a home visit said that they were afraid to use public hospitals because they would be experimented on by uncaring GOJ doctors. UNHCR's case workers noted that the current UNHCR-MOH agreement excludes emergency obstetrics care. They also reported that outside of Amman, more mainstreaming of public health care is happening.

¶20. (SBU) UNHCR's Riza said that UNHCR can do a better job in 2008 of leveraging its assistance, for instance in health care. After three attempts, UNHCR inked an \$11 million agreement with the MoH in 2007, and Riza suggested that it can and should get more for their money. If the USG and other donors continue to support MoH through bilateral aid, Riza suggested they develop a better donor coordination mechanism on health care.

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Internally Displaced Persons

¶21. (SBU) UNHCR-Iraq's Roggia briefed on UNHCR Iraq's efforts to assist internally displaced persons (IDPs). In 2007, UNHCR spent \$28 million; in 2008, it intends to budget \$45 million. Roggia said that Special Representative of the Secretary-General Mistura is looking to establish rapid

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response mechanisms to provide immediate assistance to returnees, and noted the recent efforts of Iraq's MODM to become an "operational" ministry by purchasing food stuffs and non-food items for distribution. According to Roggia, approximately 63 per cent of the returnees in November were IDPs and 37 per cent were refugees, primarily from Syria. UNHCR Iraq's staff observed a number of test visits where a male family member returned and, said that if conditions allowed, the family intended to follow. Roggia described the security situation as "unquestionably better" in some parts of Baghdad, but wondered whether it was sustainable. He expressed their concern that the GOI might begin to pressure Iraqi refugees and IDPs to

return, and expected to be approached shortly by Iraqi Prime Minister or MODM to participate in GOI information campaigns.

He said that UNHCR remains hesitant to do so for fear they would be perceived as prematurely encouraging returns. Roggia also stressed the finite absorption capacity of the receiving communities, many of which have not yet been rebuilt.

¶22. (U) Staffdel Cammack did not have the opportunity to review this cable prior to their departure.

Visit Amman's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman/>

Hale